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SUBJECT: LOOKING AHEAD ON THE SUDAN AEC

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Classified By: CDA Alberto M. Fernandez, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Norway's Ambassador to Khartoum, in his capacity as Interim AEC (Assessment and Evaluation Commission) Chairman called AEC working group chairs (US, UK, Norway, Italy, Netherlands) together to survey the way ahead for the Commission over the next few months. UK Ambassador reported on the steps taken to get former UK Ambassador to Egypt Derek Plumley accepted as the new AEC Chairman. She noted that the National Congress Party (NCP) had held an internal meeting on Dec 24 to discuss the nomination. NCP rep to the AEC Dr. Said al-Khatib subsequently told her that the Sudanese preferred that a senior UK minister should formally present the nomination to the Sudanese Government. Presidential Advisor Mustafa Othman Ismail suggested as an alternative a letter from the UK Foreign Minister to Sudanese MFA Deng Alor or from PM Brown to President Al-Bashir and FVP Salva Kiir.

12. (C) UK Ambassador noted that, now that the SPLM has returned to the Government of National Unity, the NCP seems to have no sense of urgency about a new AEC Chairman. They see it as a way of squeezing some more attention and recognition from the international community, especially from the UK, before acquiescing to Plumley. She said that Minister Lord Maloch Brown was already intending to come to Sudan at the end of January, so that could be an opportunity to officially present the candidature (again) to the two parties. Al-Khatib had also implied that there would be no major changes in the makeup of the composition of the AEC with the possible exception of "adding one country" (speculation is that the Sudanese want to add China to the AEC).

13. (C) Italian Ambassador remarked that instability in Kenya probably precludes any sort of IGAD summit and that the IGAD Partners Forum is also on hold. Norway highlighted the importance of an enhanced UN role at the AEC but this has been stymied by the skepticism of Assistant SRSG Tayye Brooke-Zerihoun. Zerihoun's departure at the end of January may make it easier for UN SRSG Ashraf Qazi to engage with the Commission. It was agreed to set up an ad hoc drafting committee, headed by the UK, to come up with draft terms of reference for the July 2008 mid-year review and to come up with a list of priorities for each working group for the next 6 months.

14. (C) Norwegian Ambassador asked about the next Sudan Consortium, supposedly scheduled for March, as a possible opportunity to stress CPA implementation. The Norwegians were willing to host an "Oslo 2" but some Sudanese officials had intimated that they preferred Paris as a site. This was an odd choice since Paris was not a major donor for the CPA. The World Bank, which should take the lead in organizing, had not really engaged on this event yet. Several present noted that past meetings had been more "pledging conferences" and had stayed away from political issues.

¶15. (C) The Norwegians also detailed their last attempt to get Sudanese acceptance of a Nordic unit for UNAMID. They had met with the new GNU Minister of Cabinet Affairs (SPLM SecGen) Pagan Amun. Amun had checked with the NCP and was told that the Nordics were unacceptable for three reasons: such a unit would attract Al-Qa'ida attention which may already be increasing in Sudan, some in the NCP believe that the Engineering Unit could be part of a Western plot to overthrow the NCP linking up with Darfur rebels and EUFOR in Chad, and finally, President Al-Bashir had already publicly rejected them and to backtrack now would be embarrassing to the President. US CDA noted that none of these reasons had anything to do with past excuses by the Sudanese which had been that the Nordic offer was too late or extraneous to the African makeup of the force.

¶16. (C) Comment: With the two parties to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) currently enjoying a brief honeymoon (reftel), real interest by the SPLM and NCP in the hard work of the Commission has shriveled. Key issues like Abyei are now the purview of the Office of the Presidency. In the long run, we expect the two sides to resume their traditional roles at the AEC: the NCP will focus on form over substance, on procedural and bureaucratic maneuvering. The SPLM will really engage only if their frustrations once again begin to mount and they feel the need for additional fora to pressure the NCP and garner foreign support for their positions. End comment.

FERNANDEZ